

A Study of Postgraduate Students' Writing Skills in Multisyllable English Words

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 17.12.2024

Accepted: 18.12.2024

Published: 20.12.2024

Citation:

Subramanian, VM. "A Study of Postgraduate Students' Writing Skills in Multisyllable English Words." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 13, no. S1, 2024, pp. 18-23.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v13iS1-Dec.8513>

Dr. V. M. Subramanian

*Associate Professor and Head i/c, Department of Linguistics
Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India*

Abstract

The present study investigates the writing skills of postgraduate students specifically to find their ability to write multisyllabic words in English. This research purposes to identify common challenges, techniques and strategies adopted by students, and the factors that influence their proficiency in writing multisyllabic words in English language. This study involves both qualitative and quantitative methods to find out students' spelling errors, syllable division, and overall writing abilities related to multisyllabic words. Results from the study highlight common errors, such as misapplication of syllable division rules, the influence of spoken forms in writing, and difficulties with syllable divisions. Hence this study provides practical recommendations for improving postgraduate students' ESL writing skills in relation to multisyllabic words.

Keywords: Spelling, Multisyllabic Words, Grapheme-phoneme Combinations, Syllable Division

Introduction

Multisyllabic words and the words consist of more than one syllable, are a significant feature of English language. The formation of multisyllable words in English follows several patterns, often influenced by the combination of roots, prefixes, and suffixes, as well as changes in pronunciation and stress. Students can take up basic practices to get fluency in recognising the words while reading Syllable types help struggling readers to decode long words (Bhattacharya and Ehri). Mastery of writing these words is important not only for academic writing but also for professional communication. However, postgraduate students often encounter challenges in spelling, pronouncing, and using multisyllabic words correctly. This study explores how postgraduate students at university level handle the complexities of writing multisyllabic English words, with a specific focus on their spelling, syllabic division skills, words and sounding in relation to phoneme-grapheme combinations.

Multisyllabic words, given their complexity, pose several challenges, including issues with phonetic and graphic discrepancies, irregular spellings, and difficulty in recognizing syllabic patterns. Students of ESL face several challenges while writing particularly when move beyond basic vocabulary and engage with more technical, academic, and subject related words. Considering the issues related to multisyllabic writing present research takes up the following questions to proceed the research.

- Do the postgraduate students handle all the words regardless the syllabi forms in their writing?

- What type of words pose threat to the postgraduate students while writing?
- What are the reasons behind writing multisyllabic words and how to rectify problem?

Researches on testing the multisyllabic words in academic writings are not widely conducted among ESL learners and the present research takes up this topic for study. Therefore, the goal of this research is to assess postgraduate students' writing skills and provide insights into potential areas for interference. The processes of compounding, affixation, and borrowing, along with the use of classical roots, are the most common ways to form multisyllable words in English. The following table details this process with examples.

Table 1

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Compound Words	Prefixation	Suffixation	Root Words from Latin and Greek	Reduplication	Borrowing from Other Languages	Stress and Pronunciation Shifts	Backformation and Neologism
toothbrush (tooth + brush)	unhappy (un- + happy)	happiness (happy + -ness)	biology (Greek: bio- = life, -logy = study of)	zigzag tick-tock	café (French) karaoke (Japanese)	hydroelectric (hydro- = water, electric)	editorialize (from editorial) burglarize (from burglar)
notebook (note + book)	rewrite (re- + write)	quickly (quick + -ly)	transport (Latin: trans- = across, -port = carry)			microbiology (micro- = small, biology)	

Aim of the Research

- To identify the common spelling and writing errors made by postgraduate students when writing multisyllabic English words
- To identify the strategies and techniques postgraduate students use to manage phonetic-graphic skills with respect to multisyllabic words
- To identify the students' level of language proficiency, influence their ability to correctly write multisyllabic words

Literature Review

Previous studies have explored language proficiency and writing skills, particularly with regard to spelling and writing complex words.

Phonemic Awareness and Syllable Division

Research has shown that difficulties in dividing words into syllables can lead to spelling errors in multisyllabic words. Misunderstanding the stress patterns and syllabic divisions is a common cause of errors.

Spelling Patterns and Irregularities

English is known for its irregular spelling rules, which can be especially problematic for non-native speakers or learners with less exposure to standard English spelling (Snow). For example, words like colonel, though, and plumber present challenges due to silent letters and non-phonetic spelling.

Academic Writing and Vocabulary

A study by (Sokolik) highlighted that postgraduate students often struggle with the use of advanced vocabulary in academic writing. Multisyllabic words, in particular, require mastery of both pronunciation and spelling, and students frequently rely on their oral knowledge of words, which can lead to errors in writing.

Cognitive Load

Cognitive load theory suggests that tasks requiring the processing of complex information such as writing multisyllabic words can overwhelm students, especially if they are already dealing with high levels of

academic stress (Uzun). Thus, students may make more errors when writing multisyllabic words than when writing simpler words.

Methodology

This study takes up the combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to assess postgraduate students' writing skills with respect to multisyllabic words.

Selection of Informants

A total number of 50 postgraduate students from the Faculty of Arts at Bharathiar University participated in the study. The students were selected randomly from various academic disciplines, of humanities and social sciences.

Data Collection

Writing Test: Students were asked to complete a writing task that required them to use multisyllabic words in context. The task included academic topics related to their subjects. Each test was analyzed for spelling errors, syllable division errors, and phoneme-grapheme combination in writing.

Surveys and Questionnaires: Participants completed a survey that assessed their approach to writing multisyllabic words, their strategies of phoneme-grapheme combinations, ability to handle multisyllable words and divisions.

Interviews: Followed by the test 20 students participated in follow up interviews. The interviews aimed to find out students' strategies and techniques they adopted while writing multisyllabic words especially when they are not having adequate fluency in it.

Data Analysis

- The writing tests were analyzed to identify the students errors in spelling, syllable division letter order, misplacement of syllables and writing words as they sound.
- The survey and questionnaire responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in students' writings and applied error analysis.
- The interview responses were decoded and analyzed to identify the techniques and challenges of writing multisyllabic words among the ESL students.

Results of the Study

The analysis of the writing test conducted among the students using questionnaire and interviews provide the following findings:

Common Errors

- The most frequent spelling errors were related to irregular phoneme-grapheme combination.
- Errors in syllable division were also found among most of the students. Errors are also found significantly in inconsistent split of words in writing.
- Misapplication of common orthographic rules in writing letters in reverse orders.

Techniques, Strategies and Tools used for the Study

1. Students used phonetic spelling as a common strategy, trying to sound out words based on how they hear them in speech. Syllable types, also called syllable patterns, are common configurations of letter sound correspondences (Honig et al.).
2. Repetition and memorization were also frequently cited methods for reinforcing correct spelling, especially for subject-specific words found in academic text books.
3. Dictionary use was a widely employed technique for checking unfamiliar multisyllabic words and practice them with recalling techniques.

Discussion and Findings

The elucidation of the data shows that students meet significant challenges while writing multisyllabic words in English. Common spelling errors are often influenced by the complexity of English phoneme-grapheme combinations and students writing also influenced by the spoken language forms. Most of the students were able to identify the placement of syllable in the right position of the word whereas they fail in writing the spelling of the words.

Table 2 Students' Errors Fall under the Following Categories

Irregular Spelling	Syllable Division	Reversal of Letter Order	Misplacement of Syllables	Homophone	Writing words as they sound	Multisyllable Word
25%	10%	12%	5%	7%	18%	23%

Irregular Spelling (25%)

A significant portion of the spelling errors (25%) falls under irregular spelling. This result shows that students encountered higher level of issues with spelling in writing the words those with irregular phonetic or orthographic patterns. These errors are found due to confusing vowels, silent letters, or non-standard spelling patterns of English language. This category also includes errors related to misspelling and irregularly spelled multisyllabic words.

Syllable Division (10%)

About 10% of the errors were found due to incorrect type of syllable division specifically in double syllable words. It is found that a smaller percentage of the students had trouble breaking down longer words into the correct syllables. Common mistakes in this category include splitting words where syllables should not be separated also combining syllables incorrectly leading to non word results.

Reversal of Letter Order (12%)

Almost 12% of errors occurred in reversal of letter order, meaning that letters within a word were trans positioned. This error may have associated with lack of attention or confusion between similar-looking letter pairs, especially in multisyllabic words with more complex spellings and more similar phonemic forms.

Misplacement of Syllables (5%)

Misplacement of syllables are found among students writing lead to 5% of the errors. Students have written words with syllables in the wrong order and misplaced in pre or post forms. This error is rarely seen but can happen in complex words, especially when the students are unaware of the proper syllabic form of the word.

Homophone (7%)

Errors in homophone are found about 7% and this is due to students' confusion in identification of words that sound the same but are spelled differently.

Writing Words as They Sound (18%)

The second highest 18% of errors occurred due to students' writing words as they sound, indicating that they wrote the words based on their phonetic notion rather than the correct spelling. This reflects the students' lack of knowledge in understanding the phonetic – graphic combination. This error is found among the words with multisyllabic forms and less frequently used.

Multisyllable Word (23%)

Multisyllabic word errors (23%) are related to the issues specifically in complexity of multisyllabic words. This includes problems with syllable placement in the right order of the word. It is found that 23% errors fell in this category and the second highest among others. Students got confused in organising the words with multisyllabic forms while writing.

The most common error was found in irregular spelling (25%), followed by multisyllabic word category

(23%) both of which highlight greater risks among students of ESL. A special teaching and training module need to be supplemented for these learners so as to make them understand the nuances of phoneme-grapheme combinations and understanding the multisyllabic words in its right structures.

Reasons behind the Poor Recall Abilities of Multisyllable Words

Poor recall abilities for multisyllable words can arise from a combination of cognitive, linguistic, and educational factors. These challenges often stem from the complexity of multisyllable words in terms of their length, structure, and irregularities in pronunciation and spelling. Wide reading is the most important kind of practice. The greater ease students gain with word recognition, the better their fluency and the more likely they are to build comprehension (Snow et al.). Multisyllable words require holding multiple sounds, syllables, and meanings in working memory simultaneously, which can overwhelm learners, particularly those with weaker memory skills. The phonological loop in working memory, responsible for processing and storing sounds, may struggle with longer and more complex words. Irregular English spelling and pronunciation patterns make it hard to establish a stable phonetic memory. Words with multiple affixes (misunderstanding, disorganization) are harder to recall due to their layered structure. Lack of repeated exposure to multisyllable words prevents their integration into long-term memory. Learners often struggle with less commonly used multisyllable words, especially those outside everyday conversation (photosynthesis, entrepreneur). Incorrect stress placement can alter a word's perceived structure and make it harder to recall. Learners whose native language has simpler syllabic structures or consistent stress patterns may struggle with English multisyllable words. Words like Wednesday or receipt confuse learners due to silent letters and irregular phonetic mappings, hindering recall. Learners with dyslexia struggle with phonological processing, affecting their ability to remember and retrieve multisyllable words. Memorizing words in isolation rather than in meaningful contexts reduces retention. Multisyllable words like archaeology are easier to remember when tied to a context or image.

Strategies to Improve Recall of Multisyllable Words

- Teaching syllable division rules and emphasize stress patterns.
- Practicing difficult pronunciations repeatedly.
- Breaking words into prefixes, roots, and suffixes.
- Using word families to highlight patterns.
- Incorporating words into meaningful sentences or real-life contexts.
- Using storytelling to associate words with memorable events.
- Using spaced repetition to reinforce memory.
- Engage learners in writing and speaking multisyllable words regularly.
- Pairing words with visuals, gestures, or sounds.
- Using crossword puzzles, word searches, or syllable clapping games to make learning engaging.
- Encouraging learners to use challenging words in speech and writing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study contributes to the understanding of postgraduate students' writing abilities, particularly with respect to multisyllabic words. The following recommendations are made to improve students' proficiency in writing multisyllabic words:

Incorporate Phonics and Syllable Division Instruction: Focus on the structure of multisyllabic words and how to divide them into manageable syllables. Phonics training should be reinforced, especially for non-native speakers.

Use Technology and Digital Tools: Encourage the use of digital tools such as spelling and grammar checkers, as well as applications that focus on phonetics and syllable stress.

Reinforce Contextual Learning: Students need to be encouraged to engage with multisyllabic words in context through reading academic research papers, writing articles, and attending classes.

Promote Vocabulary Development: Teaching learning curriculum should introduce new strategies such as learning all lexical items roots, prefixes, and suffixes, lexemes can improve students' ability to spell and understand multisyllabic words worth right phonetic-graphic combinations.

- Writing workshops and hands of training sessions: Providing hands on training for writing courses and workshops for specifically training target spelling and pronunciation of multisyllabic words will pave the way for students improve their writing skills.
- Listening and Recall Tests: Students should be given practices to retain their lexical knowledge in identification and reproduction. Computert based Listening and recall activities will help in these types of activities.
- These suggestions and could help educators so as to help postgraduate students enhance their writing proficiency in multisyllabic words and facilitating better academic performance for a flawless communication in English.

Suggestions for Future Researches

- Comparative studies on speaking and writing of multisyllabic words can be conducted to ensure the phoneme – grapheme incorporation
- Studies related to spelling and phonetic transcription at word levels and syntactic levels
- Researches on pronunciation of the students to identify the utterance of the word's phonemic perfection

Works Cited

1. Bhattacharya, Alpana, and Linnea C. Ehri. "Graphosyllabic Analysis helps Adolescent Struggling Readers Read and Spell Words." *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2004, pp. 331-48.
2. Honig, Bill, et al. *Teaching Reading: Sourcebook for Kindergarten through Eighth Grade*. High Noon Books, 2004.
3. Snow, Catherine E., et al. *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. National Academy Press, 1998.
4. Snow, Catherine E. "Academic Language and the Challenge of Reading for Learning about Science." *Science*, vol. 328, 2010, pp. 450-52.
5. Sokolik, Maggie. *Academic and Business Writing*. Wayzgoose Press, 2014.
6. Uzun, Kutay. "Cognitive Load Theory and Educational Implications." *International Congress on Life, Social, and Health Sciences in a Changing World*, 2022.